

Report of the Disaster Response Coordinator

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It is with mixed emotions that I write this my last report as Disaster Response Coordinator. I submitted my letter of resignation in January of 2009 stating I would continue until someone was appointed to the position or July 1 which ever came first. During 2007-2008, Judy Moore put in many hours as the Co-Coordinator. She and her husband Doug have moved to New Orleans to continue the work they have been doing there.

I believe this ministry holds great potential for the Vermont Conference. Churches that do the work of preparing their entire congregation for a possible disaster inevitably improve communication in all areas of the life of their church. They also connect with the community around them in new and positive ways. When a Conference takes seriously the preparation work necessary to be ready to respond to a disaster, it is prepared for anything that might happen within its borders or to quickly and appropriately respond to any event around the world whether the vandalism of a local church, contamination of parishioners wells or a typhoon in the Pacific.

The importance of this ministry has not been realized in Vermont. There has never been any money budgeted for this ministry and there is no oversight for it within the conference structure. Much needed database software has not been purchased or created.

A two-pronged approach was necessary in establishing this ministry: 1. to organize the Churches, Associations and Conference. 2. to organize the many disaster response organizations in the state so that the Churches, Associations and Conference have a statewide framework within which to work.

My primary work over the last two years has been to create a network of non-profit disaster response agencies. As President of Vermont Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster VTVOAD, I have worked closely with Vermont Emergency Management (VEMA) to establish lines of communication during and after in-state disasters. We created a statewide Long Term Recovery Committee (LTRC) that is ready to go. We connected this committee to Vermont 211. Now at the time of a disaster VEMA puts out press releases directing victims to contact Vermont 211. The operators have an intake form to collect information. This information is forwarded to the LTRC who assesses the needs utilizing trained caseworkers. Once the needs are known the responsibility for response is divided up among the VTVOAD partners. The LTRC is made up of three VTVOAD agencies, a rep from VT Dept of Human Services and a rep. from the Community Action Organizations. The VTCUCC had a seat on the LTRC until my resignation. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief now fills that seat.

In 2007, the UCC supplied a \$1000 grant for flood recovery. This grant plus the work of many local volunteers helped a family raise their property above flood stage and rebuild their home.

In 2008, Judy Moore updated the VTCUCC Disaster Response Plan and presented it to the Board of Directors for action. She also created a booklet to help churches begin to establish a Disaster Response Ministry within their congregation. This is available on the VTCUCC Website. Judy and I have spoken with individual congregations and Associations on the importance of establishing a plan before disasters happen.

Two areas in need of immediate focus by the VTCUCC are 1. to have a disaster response resource database. 2. to create awareness of and respond to Technology Caused Disaster. This is the most prevalent type of disaster in Vermont. Sick buildings, brown fields, asbestos, well contamination, etc. affect many of our parishioners. The UCC is the only religious based organization responding to this type of disaster and providing for long term recovery.

I pray the Vermont Conference will take seriously this important ministry by promptly filling this vacant position, establishing a line item in the budget and providing for clear lines of communication.

